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ABSTRACT

A survey conducted in Arkansas gathered information pertinent to the status of civics. The purpose was to develop a model teacher training program for civics teachers in the Arkansas public secondary schools and to propose revisions in the certification requirements. The survey obtained general information about civics including curriculum data, adequacy of teacher preparation, and the attitudes of social science teachers toward civics. A five-question survey was administered to teachers of civics in 198 secondary schools, selected at random, with each school size represented proportionally. Data gathered on the size of schools where civics is taught, a summary of academic majors and minors of participants, and the average number of hours taken in political science are tabulated and analyzed. In a summary analysis of the survey, the following observations are made: civics is taught in 95% of the Arkansas public secondary schools and is required in two-thirds of them; teacher preparation is inadequate; most teachers consider themselves qualified but believe more hours in political science should be required for future teacher certification; additional hours in political science with more practical orientation are needed; the selection of textbooks is out-dated and limited. Recommendations based on the data conclude the study. (Author/KSM)

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THE STATUS OF CIVICS IN THE ARKANSAS PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

by

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THE STATUS OF CIVICS IN THE ARKANSAS PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

A survey conducted recently has afforded pertinent information concerning the status of civics in Arkansas public secondary schools. As a result, we are in a much better position to say how well the teachers in Arkansas are prepared to teach civics, what their courses in the subject are like, and what they think of the value of what they are teaching. If the information had been available earlier, teacher preparation might be better today.

Requirements for teacher certification in civics have been gradually reduced by adding requirements in other areas of social science. For example, the Arkansas State Department of Education will require one course in economics for all social science teachers, beginning September 1, 1975. Approval has been granted at Arkansas State University for the substitution of Basic Social Science I (a general survey of all forms of government) for United States Government (a study of U. S. Government exclusively). The substitution does not seem to be valid, for the subject matters are obviously different. The state certification requirement for history is as much as 23 hours; that for civics, only eight. (See Laws and Regulations Governing the Certification of Teachers, Administrators, and Supervisors, Bulletin VI, State Department of Education, 1972, p. 23.) It is a strange situation when 23 semester hours are required to teach history and only eight to teach civics. In all major areas at least 21 hours are required for certification. The recent changes are of concern to whoever is associated with the teaching of civics. The concern, therefore, motivated a study of the status of civics in the Arkansas public secondary schools.

We hope that a change can be made, and that information derived from the study can be used to help develop a model teacher training program for civics teachers in the Arkansas public secondary schools and to propose revisions in the certification requirements. The survey was made to obtain general information about civics including curriculum data, adequacy of teacher preparation, and the attitudes of social science teachers toward civics. The following questions were asked:

1. How much civics is being taught in the state's secondary public schools?
2. What is the training of the teachers?
3. Do the teachers consider their preparation adequate?
4. How many hours of political science are necessary for adequate training?
5. What recommendations do the civics teachers have for the qualifications of future teachers?

The survey was limited to Arkansas and Arkansas public secondary schools:

1. One hundred ninety-eight schools were selected at random.
2. Each school size was represented proportionally.
3. Civics teachers or principals represented each school.

The participants were, of course, civics teachers. If a high school did not have a teacher of civics, we asked the principal to cooperate. One hundred ninety-eight randomly selected high schools were invited to participate, and 51 percent of the existing public schools were represented. To ensure random selection and equal representation, we categorized the schools by size according to the standards established by the Arkansas Activities Association. Each group was represented in

proportion to the total number of schools found in its size category by a stratified random sampling procedure. Of the 198 schools selected, 148 participated, representing a 75 percent response.

An analysis of the returned data reveals a mass of interesting information. And it is hoped, therefore, the information will be utilized to improve the instruction of civics in the public schools.

Let us look first at how much the subject is taught. It is taught in 95 percent of all Arkansas public secondary schools. Although the schools in the 300-599 enrollment range show the highest percent offering it, there is only a four-percent variation within the three size classifications of schools. It is interesting to note, too, that the largest schools in the state show the least proportionate offering of it. Civics teachers almost unanimously believe (97 percent) that civics should be offered in all Arkansas schools as Table 1 illustrates.

Table 1

Civics Taught in Arkansas Public Secondary Schools

Size	Number		Percent	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
0-299	51	4	92.7	7.3
300-599	64	2	97.0	3.0
600 and above	25	2	92.6	7.4
Total	140	8	94.6	5.4

And we needed to determine the number and percent of the schools offering civics and whether it was a required or an elective course. Of the 134 replying to this inquiry, only six did not reply to this question. In

two-thirds of the schools it is required. The smallest schools indicate the highest proportion of required civics as Table 2 reveals.

Table 2

Civics Required Course

Size	Number		Percent	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
0-299	36	13	73.5	26.5
300-599	36	23	61.0	39.0
600 and above	16	10	61.5	38.5
Total	88	46	65.7	34.3

An effort was made to find the grade level in which civics was offered. The largest number of schools in all size classifications offers civics in the ninth grade although many of them offer it at two or three grade levels. The breakdown is shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Grade In Which Civics Is Taught

Size	7	8	9	10	11	12
0-299	19	19	40	28	27	26
300-599	12	15	48	18	19	15
600 and above	3	2	18	13	5	13
Total	34	36	106	59	51	54

The respondents were asked to state the length of the separate civics courses. Seventy-one percent of them offered a two-semester course; 29 percent, a one-semester course. The reported information, therefore, indicates wide offerings in civics in the Arkansas public secondary schools.

Since the attitudes of civics teachers are important an effort has been made to evaluate them. Teacher preparation is, of course, vitally important to effective teaching in any discipline. A summary of the academic majors and minors of the participants is presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Summary of Academic Majors and Minors of Participants

Specialization	Total
Major:	
Social Science	62
Physical Education	27
History	25
English	11
Business	8
Political Science	8
Elementary Education	5
Bible	3
Educational Administration	3
Business Education	3
Secondary Education	2
Journalism	2
Miscellaneous	9
Total	168
Minor:	
Social Science	43
English	32
History	12
Physical Education	9
Speech	7
Psychology	7
Political Science	5
Education	4
Business	4
Industrial Arts	3
Agriculture	3
Economics	2
Elementary Education	2
French	2
Music Education	2
Miscellaneous	8
Total	147

Serious doubts are nevertheless raised concerning qualifications. The fact is that as many as 45 of the 131 teachers responding have completed less than nine hours of political science (including Basic Social Science I), although only eight of the respondents feel that they are not qualified to teach the subject.

Table 5

Average Number of Hours in Political Science

Size	Number	Average Hours
0-299	53	13*
300-599	62	13*
600 and above	26	13*

*Includes Basic Social Science I.

Almost amusing is a respondent's conclusion that he is qualified to teach civics with only a few hours in political science but that a much larger number hours of political science should be required for certification. The majority believed that the average minimum number of hours desirable for certification should be 16. While the majority thought that at least 16 hours should be required for certification, 61 percent of all the respondents have completed 15 hours of less. A more detailed breakdown is shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Hours in Political Science

Size	15 Hours or Less Number	Percent	16 Hours or More Number	Percent
0-299	30	56.6	23	43.4
300-599	39	63.0	23	37.0
600 and above	17	65.4	9	34.6
Total	86	61.0	55	39.0

Let me restate that the majority of teachers consider themselves only qualified to teach civics with few hours, but that at least 16 hours should be required for others. Furthermore, only one-third of all the civics teachers were specifically prepared to teach civics.

But in spite of the inconsistency we have noticed the respondents still gave us many constructive suggestions for the improvement of civics teaching when asked to make general comments for needed changes.

Nearly three-fourths (71 percent) have indicated that more political science courses are needed for those preparing to teach in other major areas. According to a few replies:

> "Teachers that prepare, in college, to teach history receive a very small amount of preparation in civics and political science. The requirement for political science should be raised."

> "Our present system of training teachers is no good. Things need to be changed."

> "I feel less history, because everything is in courts now-a-days and not based on 1492, and the age of exploration and most of all the colonies."

I should like to add that they would like to see more practical application of principles of government in their training. More particularly, they wanted the study of politics and government to be made more relevant to the operation of the political process.

What political science courses would best prepare teachers? A large majority placed courses in United States Government and State and Local Governments at the top of the list, and as equally important. Not of primary importance, but still necessary courses were International Politics, American Foreign Policy, Comparative Governments, Constitutional Law, and Political Parties and Pressure Groups.

That the present textbooks were inadequate was the most serious complaint. I shall cite a few of the complaints and suggestions:

> "We are in need of good civics textbooks. I really don't use one because I cannot find one that helps me teach what I teach."
>
> "I think we need a revision of textbooks used and a change in the philosophy of teaching ideals."
>
> "I do not like the textbook used in my school for the civics course. I have checked to see if the book could be changed but I can't find any publishing companies other than the one we use that publishes a civics book. I think a good civics course should include studies in government, foreign relations, community planning, and studies in different vocations."
>
> "The textbook for civics should be brought up-to-date. There is a lot of material in the book that could be left out or combined with one chapter."

And I believe they will agree that first of all the content should provide knowledge that would assist students in working for orderly change within the democratic process. What can we do to improve the situation? It seems that Professors of Political Science and teachers of secondary school courses working together, could revise the current texts or

select superior ones. The protest movements of the sixties demonstrated that our methods for peaceful change were inadequate. They are still inadequate. No doubt, it will be agreed that the textbooks should stress the duties and responsibilities of citizenship.

In summary, the survey revealed that civics is taught in 95 percent of the Arkansas public secondary schools, and that it is a required course in two-thirds of them.

It has revealed that teacher preparation is inadequate when only one-third of the teachers are specifically prepared to teach civics. While most of the teachers considered themselves qualified they still believed that considerable more hours than they had completed (61 percent) had 15 hours or less in political science) should be required for certification of future teachers.

Finally, there was a general concensus of the need for additional hours in political science with more practical orientation. The strongest criticism, however, was directed at out-dated and limited selection of textbooks.

In conclusion and as a result of the study, I shall of course offer my recommendations.

1. Civics should be made a state requirement for granting a high school diploma in Arkansas.

2. Certification in social science should be by specific academic area rather than general social science certification with a minimum of eight semester hours as presently required for civics.

3. Arkansas social science certification requirements include only three semester hours of United States Government. Since most social science teachers do teach civics, it is, therefore, essential for the requirement to be increased to a minimum of nine hours of political science, excluding Basic Social Science I.

4. A minimum of 15 semester hours in political science should be required for state certification to teach civics.

5. More political science courses should be offered in extension and summer workshops to aid in-service teachers.

6. Civics textbooks should be written and/or revised to make them more relevant to the needs and interests of students.

7. Six semester hours in political science should be required for the MSE degree in social science.